Lady in Red

A Resistor

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Summary

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Description:

With the Mist War drawn to a close, the nations all began a gradual healing process. Seemingly bereft of purpose and on the cusp of making a painful decision, Freya turned her eyes towards Alexandria. Set post-game.

1. Nostalgia

A/N: I've edited the structure of this story, to transform it into a cohesive work as opposed to unrelated one shots.

Burmecia's relief efforts were coming along smoothly. The once proud architecture was mostly laid to ruins, the rain washed away much of the debris. It was a sorrowful sight. Though, the fresh-faced Queen Garnet's support had been invaluable. Certain key buildings and businesses had been fully restored over the course of a year, courtesy of Alexandria's engineers.

Lindblum would have offered support, but Cid prioritised his own city first. Understandable. Brahne's rampage had almost crippled Gaia's technological powerhouse. The scars from her reign still showed, even a year after her death. Tantalus were also out of the question, as the troupe was currently back on tour with less kidnapping this time, hopefully.

Freya stared toward the bottom of her drink as long as she could, before the spindly waiter took the empty glass away. She nodded to him appreciatively, pulling herself back to reality. ‘The Dragon and Moon’ was awfully quiet that night. The floorboards were damp with spilled alcohol, and the barkeep looked like he had more problems than his customers. Though she couldn’t judge. She had plenty of problems herself.

As the waiter zipped past her again, she waved him over. “An ale, please. Put it on my tab.” He nodded, and headed back towards the bar. Freya leaned back in her seat, and closed her eyes. Suddenly, she was interrupted by the sound of a chair screeching across the floorboards across from her. “Can I help you?” She spoke, not bothering to open her eyes. It was probably just some drunkard looking to flirt with her. While most of Burmecia’s male populace tended to avoid it, due to her status and known relationship with Sir Fratley, it didn’t stop some people from trying.

“Not even gonna open your eyes, rat?” A familiar, deep voice spoke to her.

“Amarant. You come all the way out here for me?” She lifted her head up, surprised. There he

was, with his flaming red hair. Rather wisely, he brought a cloak. A black, knee-length coat with a hood. She noticed that he'd already bought a drink for himself.

He chuckled dryly. "'Course not. You're nothing special. Got a job." He took a swig of his ale.

"You mean a bounty? Go and deal with it, then." Her mood sullied. The ape-like human had just come to gloat. Combined with the alcohol, he easily agitated her.

He paused for a moment, to think. Freya noticed the raindrops in his hair. He probably never wore the hood anyway. "Nah. Wanted to get a drink first." He took his time to survey the tavern. He looked unimpressed. "Besides, you rats look funny when you frown."

The Burmecian clenched her fists, "If I'm just a joke to you, then I'd rather not be near you. Leave me alone." She growled. Though in truth, it was mostly the alcohol talking.

He laughed heartily. "If only you'd grow a backbone when it comes to that boyfriend of yours. What's his name? Forgetful?" His words goaded her.

Her short temper erupted. She growled, and threw her fist towards his face as hard as she could, trying to purge his smug grin. Being an experienced pugilist, he saw it coming a mile off. Amarant caught her fist, and bent her arm backwards over her chair. “You need to work on your punches, rat.” He remarked, condescendingly.

She seethed with anger. “Get off me, you brute!” She tried to jerk her arm away, but his grip was too strong.

“Take it outside, Freya!” The barkeep shouted over to them both, just as the waiter delivered her ale. Amarant released her arm, and she buried herself in her glass like a wounded animal.

“I was just sayin’, you should sort things out with him.” Amarant clearly knew it was a touchy subject.

She scoffed. “You don’t know the half of it. I don’t need a womanizer’s advice, thanks.” Her words were filled with venom.

He crossed his arms. “You mean Lani?” He paused for a moment, huffing. “She was my partner. Not any more.”

Freya took several gulps of her ale, and leaned over the table. “What happened?” She questioned.

“She took a hostage. I knew it was a mistake workin’ with her. Haven’t seen her since.” Beneath the mass of hair, his eyes sparkled with a hint of curiosity. “We hadn’t met yet. How’d you know about her?”

“Zidane filled me in on what happened in Madain Sari. He mentioned that a woman was with you at the time.” She slumped into her chair. The boy never returned from the Iifa tree. Her damaged heart broke even further that day. First her lover, then one of her closest friends.

Amarant, sensing her sadness, took another swig of his drink and grumbled to himself. He leaned forwards, pressing his elbows into the table, forearms outstretched. “Still no word of him. Damn monkey, sacrificing himself for an excuse like Kuja.”

“He always had heart. Went out of his way to help people, just because he could. We can all learn a lesson from him. Even you.” She glared at him, from behind her long hair.

He snorted, amused. “Only thing he taught me was that groups can find success where one can’t.”

She looked annoyed. “Zidane taught far more than that. He led a ragtag group to face the embodiment of death itself. He was a leader. He was…” Her voice lost its luster. She couldn’t bring herself to describe him further. She didn’t want to start crying in the middle of a pub, especially not in front of a man like Amarant Coral.

“If I didn’t know any better, I’d say you loved him.” He gave her an accusatory glance.

It was her turn to snort. “Then you clearly don’t understand friendship, do you? I’ve known him far longer than you. While I may not have always shown it, I cared about him, which is more than you can say.” taking a final gulp, she finished her third drink of the night.

“Speak for yourself. We were never friends.” He mumbled quietly.

Feeling the effects of the alcohol, she replied in a mocking tone. “Well, Reis forbid that you’d have a friend, you’re the Flaming Amarant aren’t you? A no-nonsense bounty hunter. No, it would be a ridiculous notion. If only you stopped acting like a conceited ass, maybe you’d have friends.”

His expression remained unchanged. “Friends are a burden. Doesn’t matter how close you think you are, they just weigh you down in the long run.”

She raised an ear. “Speaking from experience?”

He folded his arms. “You’ll never know.” Finishing his drink, he adjusted his cloak and stood up. “I’m goin’. Got a bounty to hunt.” As he turned to leave, he stopped for a moment, like he remembered something. He turned back, and handed Freya a letter.

She was confused. “Are you a moogle now, Coral?”

He shook his head, but had a hint of a smirk on his face. “Letter from Dagger.” With that, he turned back and left the pub, and Freya to her thoughts.

The night advanced, and Freya had stopped drinking. Any more, and it would have cost her a fortune. She leaned over the table, head in her hands. She couldn’t get Fratley off of her mind. The hero had started to fall back in love with her. Or perhaps, he was only trying to for old time’s sakes. He wasn’t the same man she fell in love with all those years

ago. It was like he was trying to fill out the role he once held, if only for her. It both flattered, and upset her. Shaking the thoughts from her mind, she recalled the letter.

Upon opening it, she was greeted with the familiar smell of Alexandrian perfume. Like Garnet had imprinted the smell on the paper, as well as a ticket of sorts.

'Hello Freya,

I hope this letter finds you well. I apologise for having Amarant hand it to you, but at least it gave him an excuse to come and see you. Under that gruff exterior, he cares in his own way. As you probably know, the Tantalus troupe will be holding their annual performance of 'I Want to be Your Canary' in Alexandria in a few days. Enclosed in this letter, is a ticket for you. It will be good to see you again.

Best wishes, Garnet'

Her handwriting surpassed Freya's, that much was apparent. She missed last year's performance, and felt that it was only right to see it. Zidane would have wanted her to. She sighed, and stood up from her seat. Alexandria was quite the journey.

2. A Fresh Start

A/N: What to say? I haven't updated this in a good long while. If you'd like some recommended reading, check out 'You To Guide Me' by Seventhe over on AO3. It's a fantastic read regarding the origins of Freya and Zidane's friendship, and what inspired me to continue writing.

Greeted by the morning sun, Freya's eyes fluttered open. *No hangover…* She took a moment to remember the previous night's events. Glancing around the room, she noticed that nothing was out of place, or damaged. Stumbling home in the rain was never her favourite pastime. Her hat was missing, however. *Where on Gaia did that go?* The letter she received from Garnet as well as the ticket and a old bottle of wine were scattered on her desk by the bed.

Sitting up, she noticed that she'd discarded her coat, wearing only her usual leggings, and a white undershirt. The quiet, omnipresent sound of rain pattering against the window was always there. Her

hair was matted, stuck to the fur of her head. She felt the bags under her eyes, a result of many lonely, sleepless nights. Ever since…

Staring at the unopened bottle of wine, a keepsake from her short time in Cleyra, Freya sighed deeply. Once a town of vibrant yet isolated vigour, now a lifeless sinkhole surrounded by creeping roots. A testament to her failures. The screams of those that perished that day, all for what? Even with the deep-seated hatred she once felt for Brahne, she couldn't help but feel guilt for it. The way Zidane spoke of Garnet's grief only reminded her of her own. She closed her eyes, turning her head from it. It was painful to think too deeply about. There are things that she would rather not dwell on, getting lost in one's own mind was a surefire path to despair; she would rather drown herself in the rain and drab stone and—

There came a knocking noise from her bedroom door. Quiet, yet still intimidating nonetheless. Her stomach lurched. Fratley was no doubt aware of her condition, he'd maintained a good distance from her since returning to Burmecia, like he was apprehensive that she'd suddenly snap. An unspoken tension, one that only added to the gnawing in her mind.

“Freya? Are you awake?” His voice called almost timidly.

For a moment she considered dropping her head into her pillow once more, surely he would understand. “Yes, I’m awake. You can come in.” Biting the bullet, she prepared for his usual gentle, mentorly chastisement.

Opening the door, Fratley held a reserved and tense posture; almost like he was afraid to step past the boundary the door frame provided, wearing his earth-coloured travelling garb. The sight of him still took her aback, she could almost testify that the last 5 years had passed by in a blink and nothing had changed.

Of course, that would have been a lie. Fratley was still the same as he had always been, though it felt like someone else had stolen his skin; inheriting his personality, without the memories that made the man. *The memories that shaped him.* It wasn’t his fault, she rationalised. But that never got rid of the unusual sensation she would feel when speaking with him. Amarant was right. She’d maintained the facade of politeness with him, never considering her own turmoil and addressing it. She’d had enough of it. The sleepless nights were evidence enough.

“Last night sounded rough, my lady. You stumbled in through the door, speaking of how you tried to fight with Sir Amarant of all people!” He awkwardly chuckled, though it didn’t sound genuine. Almost like was mocking her, in his own soft way.

Freya grumbled, sitting up. “He shouldn’t have started it. *I’d have kicked his arse back to Treno.*” The last part mumbled under her breath.

“Well, discretion has never been your strong suit.” He offhandedly said. His smile dropped slightly. “The King’s Minister desires to speak with you.”

Great, more problems. “Did he say why?” She asked, exasperation evident in her voice.

He shuffled to the wall adjacent from the door. “Unfortunately not. Minister Sheridan is never very forthcoming with his requests.”

The King’s Minister, Sheridan took over the King’s duties after what happened at Cleyra. His son, Puck was more content pursuing his whims. Not dissimilar to Zidane, yet he had a duty. Even if he was a child. Freya crawled out of bed, and donned her coat. She stopped herself from reaching

up to adjust her hat, second nature from how often she wore it. As she went to step past him and into the living area, Fratley spoke up. “Oh, one more thing. Your hat is by the fireplace. Have a fruitful day, my lady.” He bowed slightly, speaking with that tender voice that she missed so much. She smiled and nodded back, feeling a spark of their former bond. He was really trying, despite her own conflicts.

The rain provided a melancholic sheen to the palace plaza. Where once stood the proud centre of a nation, reduced to a washed out husk. How many times had it appeared so, during the conflicts of old? Freya could only speculate, paying more attention to the pooling moisture beneath her feet. They’d stood here and sparred before, in simpler times. When she was a recruit. The training often gruelling, he provided a comforting presence. One that always felt like a mentor, not simply teaching her out of duty to his home, but to see her flourish as the best she could be.

Glancing at the palace’s entryway, the rubble scattered upon her previous visit had vanished. She’d had no need to come back, the royal district

gave her a sense of nostalgia, too much to dwell on. With the mist finally gone, Burmecia had little need of its Dragon Knights; the grand dragons were content to remain in the mountains unless provoked. With Princess Garnet as the head of Alexandria, she was sure that there would be a time that she and her kin were no longer needed. She lifted her head, peering upwards towards the ledge she traversed when the city was in ruins. The accumulated droplets fell from the brim of her hat, landing across her face and thin tail.

Shaking her head, she stepped inside, sheltered from the rain. Beneath the open-roofed courtyard stood a lone man stood in what looked to be the king's royal robes. Had the Minister taken the former king's clothing? Or simply had a different, similar set tailored? The Minister was a short thing, his fur a few shades darker than hers; he couldn't have been past her shoulder, looking to be around his late thirties. She approached from the shadows, stepping back out into the rain.

"Have you been waiting long, Minister? My apologies for not showing sooner." She cordially began.

Ears twitching at the sound of her voice, he span around almost comically. Perhaps startled. “Ah! And here you are.” He stifled a cough with his sleeve. He had the look of a man that had been overworked, bags under his eyes and a resigned weariness behind the seemingly jovial veil he tried to parade. “You’ll be going to Alexandria soon. As I’m sure you know, our requests for foreign aid from Alexandria have fallen upon deaf ears. I’ll need you to act as a courier.”

It doesn’t help that the last time one of our ambassadors parlayed, it started the war thirty years ago. She had half a mind to put voice to her words, though an argument with the acting leader of her nation would not help anyone. “With all due respect Minister, why choose me? I’m hardly a diplomat.” Freya never prided herself upon her charisma or decorum.

He raised an eyebrow. “For starters, you’re on good terms with the Alexandrian royalty. You’ve travelled long distances before, and I trust you a damn sight more than those blasted moogles. Can’t even shine their fur without bringing their mail system to a standstill.” He shuddered, probably from being soaked in the rain as opposed to disdain, Freya surmised.

She couldn’t help but feel that the minister was trying to be rid of her for a time. An unwanted blemish on the recovering Burmecian society. Perhaps he wouldn’t even request that she return when the letter is delivered. Would Fratley wonder where she went?

With Garnet’s birthday on the horizon, perhaps this would be a chance to start over.

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